Progressive Calvinism

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A Survey Of Our First Year

This issue, the twelfth, completes the first year of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM. Let us look back.

What has been our interpretation of the Calvinist situation? It is as follows: (1) An awareness that Calvinism is presently making very little impression on the world about it. (2) A realization that Calvinism's effectiveness appears to be decreasing and that it has probably not yet come to the low point to which it is likely to fall. (3) An opinion that the *conservative* wing of Calvinism is complacent and will continue to be complacent in the sense that it will not re-examine itself to discover shortcomings which handicap Calvinism today more than formerly. (4) A conclusion that proposals under the name of Neo-Calvinism are not basically derived from the Christian religion but from secular sources. (5) The conviction that the trouble with Calvinism is not the people who will not accept Calvinism and who deride it, but that the trouble with Calvinism is Calvinism itself. (6) The conclusion that two of the several things that are wrong with Calvinism are its sanctimoniousness about brotherly love and its acceptance of the principle of coercion in violation of the Sixth Commandment.

It was to be feared that such a diagnosis would not be acceptable to most Calvinists for the reason that it does not blame somebody else — the devil, the world, the flesh, the neighbor, the government, an enemy.

PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM has set out to work on Calvinism and not on the "world" around Calvinism. Such a project was destined, when it was begun, to be unpopular and resisted. To blame Calvinism itself for its difficulties was sure to be interpreted to be disloyalty to Calvinism, contentiousness, unbrotherliness, stupidity and ignorance, conservatism, and proof that the self-critic was not a Calvinist and ought to be put out of Calvinism.

And then when we added the word *progressive* to our title we incurred a penalty from two sources: the conservatives suspected us; and the Neo-Calvinists disputed our right to the term because we did not accept *their* ideas on how to make Calvinism progressive.

So much for certain characteristics of our program and the environment in which we have operated. What have *we* done, and *how* have we worked?

Our record for the first year is not too gratifying. We are disappointed. How did we go about stirring up the situation?

Abraham Lincoln said, "If you wish to convince a man, first persuade him you are his friend." We have not worked hard enough at trying to persuade Calvinists that we are their friends.

We have abruptly and bluntly challenged the ideas of many people. However, we had a reason for that policy. That reason was that we expected otherwise to be frustrated by being deliberately ignored. We have observed that the calculating men in positions of power among Calvinists do not rush into any situation; they wait; apparently they say, "Let us see what happens; if there is nothing to it, it will die a natural death; and sooner or later these critics may make a mistake; then we will take them to task. If they continue, we can always decide later what to do." There is merit to prudence and calculation of that kind. But in order not to be frustrated by such neglect PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM has followed an *aggressive* policy. We shall continue it, and we plan to become more specific.

When we look back over the past year with disappointment, we are not blaming anyone other than ourselves. *We* are at fault. We should pursue our course with further self-criticism. On that basis we do not have doubt about the final outcome. If we work long enough on ourselves. Solomon's words will become true for us, "When a man's ways please Jehovah, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:8).

But such an "approach" on our part should not be interpreted to mean that we shall cease and desist from attacking what we consider to be basic errors and heresies in Neo-Calvinism. The trouble with Calvinism is the *basic content* of its moral message and not how skillfully or clumsily it presents that message. Much of the modern message of Calvinism we consider to be conspicuously wrong because it involves both incorrect interpretations of Scripture and reasoning errors. We cannot bring ourselves to appear to be reconciled with ideas which we consider unscriptural and incorrect.

If it is possible to relieve Neo-Calvinism of the worst of its unsound ideas, we plan to endeavor to do some promotional work for Calvinism. But we are reluctant to do that among our neighbors as long as part of the message which has a Calvinist label is contrary to common sense and to Scripture. (We have in mind such ideas as *brotherly love* when that term is given a sanctimonious, unscriptural meaning; or the idea that *all* governments are "from God" in the sense that they have the approval of God, and *therefore* should be obeyed, etc.)

Let us express a further disillusionment which we feared, but against which we hoped. The conservatives in the Christian Reformed church are reluctant to join us. They suspect us. They realize we are *progressive*. They hardly want any changes. They are afraid of our "changes." We refer these conservative Calvinists to our first twelve issues. Have we stayed strictly with Scripture? If not, where did we deviate? We have handicapped the increase of our reader list by sticking so close to Scripture. Non-Calvinist readers are annoyed by our references to Scripture and our attention to the peculiarities of the Christian Reformed Calvinists.

We are also disappointed, as we were almost certain that we would be, at the response from the youth in the Christian Reformed church. Many are staying with the "Neo-Calvinism" taught in denominational schools. It would have been naive to have expected the contrary. Members of the Christian Reformed church are assessed to pay for the education of the youth of the denomination. With that education those assessed to finance it may perchance strongly disagree. Against that big assessment machinery providing large financial means, and systematic instruction, an enterprise as PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM will not initially make much progress. It is almost a forlorn hope.

But if PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM continues, it may prove to be a small stone loosened from the top of a mountain, and as it goes down it may loosen other stones, and more, and more, until there may be an avalanche. It is possible that the valley may be buried. What passes for Neo-Calvinism may not then exist any more. If the small stone *we* are loosening does not do it, some other stone by someone else will do it. Truth, we trust, prevails eventually

because the world has been so organized that it is impossible basically to survive on the basis of indubitable error. What does not harmonize with Scripture — Scripture being assumed to have a special origin — *finally* cannot survive.

We make a direct appeal to all — conservatives, Neo-Calvinists and youth, and also non-Calvinists — to read what we have published and shall publish, as something well-intentioned for the promotion of the Christian religion.

F.N.

Praxeology

You may never have seen the word *praxeology* before. You will probably not be able to find the word in your dictionary. It is pronounced prax e o' logy.

Praxeology is the science of "human action." That is a definition which unfortunately will not mean much to many people. Let us endeavor in a popular way to give the term more meaning. We are interested in doing that because PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is operating almost entirely in the field of praxeology, the field of human action.

Consider the very well-known idea of morality. The idea of *morality* obviously is inseparable from the field of human action. When we talk *morality,* we are merely appraising *human action* from a particular viewpoint.

But let us proceed. The now-rather-standard way of subdividing the sciences is as follows:

1. *Physical Sciences* : Astronomy, Chemistry, Geology, Physics, etc.
2. *Biological Sciences* : Botany, Zoology, Physiology, etc.
3. *Social Sciences* : History, Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Psychology (also under Biological Sciences), etc.

4. *Humanities* : Languages, Arts, Philosophy, Mathematics, etc.

Where in this classification is praxeology which we have described as the science of human action? Let us return to the four major divisions in the foregoing, and let us set up a table which will show how praxeology fits into the picture.

Customary Classification	The Classification We Are Using (Borrowing)
Biological Sciences	Biological Sciences
Physical Sciences	Physical Sciences
Social Sciences	Praxeology
Humanities	Humanities

From the foregoing, readers will learn that *one* definition of *praxeology* is that it is another name for the *social sciences* collectively. The social sciences, too, deal with certain phases of *human action.*

But why select a difficult name to replace an easy and customary name? Two fundamental reasons for a preference for *praxeology* are that the term is genuinely broader than the term, social sciences, and it approaches the real subject matter in a more-unified manner than does the latter term.

Praxeology covers action that has *individual* significance as well as action that has *social* significance. This is an important difference. The term, *social* sciences, is a term which is inadequate for covering the whole field which a comprehensive term for human action should cover.

The doings of men can be viewed from a *social* viewpoint; they can also be viewed from an *individual* viewpoint. Certainly some action can have a purely *personal* aim, just your *own* choice and your *own* satisfaction, that is, pure individualism. (We refer to action which aims to please yourself, but without exploiting your neighbor.)

To be a *social* scientist may imply that you hold all human action must be for one other person, or for several other people, or that all human action must be looked at as merely part of a

collective whole. When we accept the term, praxeology, we mean that thereby we are not restricting our approach to human action to a *social* approach but that we also include an *individualist* approach. The founders of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM are in that specific sense praxeologists; we are definitely interested in interpreting human action from an individualist viewpoint even more than from a social viewpoint.

To many Calvinists the idea that we consider ourselves Calvinists *and* praxeologists will appear sinful. When they hear that human action can properly be *individual as well as social*, they become angry. For them, a man who has purely *individual* purposes is a sinner, really untouched by the grace of God. The "progression" by which you become a sinner if you are such an individualist is easy to trace once you have become aware of the pattern of the accusation. Here is the rambling method by which you are kept out of good Neo-Calvinist society;

(1) You are not *social* minded.

(2) If you are not social minded, then you lack brotherly love.

(3) If you lack brotherly love, then you are an individualist.

(4) If you are an individualist, you make your own choices.

(5) If you make your own choices, you are pursuing your self-regarding interests.

(6) If you pursue your self-regarding interests, you are selfish.

(7) If you are selfish, you are an exploiter of others.

(8) If you are an exploiter of others, you are a capitalist.

(9) If you are a capitalist, you are not a Christian.

(10) In fact, neither capitalism nor communism is Christian.

(11) But Christianity is beautifully situated midway between these two extremes.

(12) Christianity is the Middle-of-the-Road. Add two sins or two neutralities together, capitalism and communism, and divide by two, and you have the pure *perfection* of Christianity!

The foregoing is a pretty fair approximation of the conclusion of Abraham Kuyper and his followers. He repudiated *both* capitalism and communism. He declared that he steered between those two undesirables. His position, he thought, had none of the disadvantages of capitalism, but all of its good points; his position, he also thought, had none of the disadvantages of socialism, but all of its good points.

The method to accomplish that Middle-of-the-Road course was to be in-between. That *inbetweenness* consisted, in turn, in two phases — (1) keeping the appearance of capitalism and (2) introducing the basic principle if not the reality of socialism. The customary word for such a system is Interventionism — the goverment, having a pipe line of power from God justifying such intervention, leaves life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness *nominally* in your name but *regulates* it, little or much as the government in its sovereign right decides, by having laws that interfere and bureaucrats who manage. Hitler was a *full-fledged* interventionist. The German term for full-fledged interventionism is *Zwangswirtschaft* (a coercive society). (A Dutchman would translate that as *Dwang maatschappij*.) Abraham Kuyper believed in just the right (?) degree of *dwang maatschappij* (coercive society). He was a *moderate* Hitlerite.

In some denominational schools of Calvinist churches in America they teach an identical doctrine. Not capitalism; oh no; it is sinful or neutral. Not socialism; oh no; it is sinful or neutral. Instead, they teach interventionism — a God-given *dwang maatschappij* (coercive society) with the right to coercion — contrary to the Decalogue — piped right out of the bottom of the throne of God. But, naturally, only beneficent and welfare-producing coercion!

When we describe *praxeology* as the social sciences viewed from the viewpoint of the individual and including individualistically directed action as well as socially directed action, we are giving a *popular* definition* which we obtained from a young person. We were sitting at a Thanksgiving Day dinner table and we substituted the word *praxeology* for *social sciences,* and then added the further explanation that *praxeology* means *human action.* It was then that the young person at the table spontaneously interrupted with the idea that praxeology covers *individually-motivated* action as well as *socially-motivated* action. He had had a flash of real understanding.

The term, praxeology, can be used to name certain sciences collectively, as political science, history, economics, sociology, but it can also be used to integrate (tie together) those sciences. For many *social* scientists their particular brand of the social sciences is an independent science not basically related to the other social sciences; for them, the social sciences have no basically unifying principle. But praxeology becomes more than a collective name when the common, universal *cause* of all human action is realized, namely, that human action has an end, a purpose, in mind which is, in turn, dependent on some "value" which the acting person sets upon that purpose. *All life then becomes a question of* VALUES. And the difference between the conduct of one man from the conduct of another man is because the first man's *valuations* are different from the second man's valuation, both as to ends and the means of those ends. Everything becomes a question of *values,* nonmonetary as well as monetary. Praxeology covers, therefore, not only *all* human action rather than merely *social* human action; it also has the only real unifying principle or explanatory principle for all the sciences covering human — that is, purposeful — action. The *common denominator* of praxeology is human *values* which are all related to each other, jostling each other around for higher ranking, each one at the expense of another. In that sense all the social sciences are merely aspects of the basic science pertaining to human action, namely, praxeology.

Praxeology analyzes two things, human *aims* and the *means* to attain those human aims. It does *not* set out to appraise those

*For an exact definition of praxeology, see Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action,* Chapters I through VII.

aims by declaring what those aims *ought* to be. The aims are left unrestricted; how those aims are ranked (which is to get preference over another) is something for the individual to decide. Praxeology merely ascertains the aims, and then analyzes the *means* used to attain the *aims*. The analysis has a very simple principle, namely, are the means suited to the declared end, (*without coercion,* and if coercion is attempted, will the coercion be effective for attaining the end).

The specific praxeological science which has concerned itself with *values* is economics. The concept of praxeology is broader than the popular idea of economics. Economics has (unfairly) been described as the study of values in the *material* field -- the field of wealth and property. Praxeology distinctly covers the whole field of values, spiritual, cultural, material — in short, all values, because all those *values* affect and determine human action.

There is a world-famous economist who has systematically broadened the approach to economics to a praxeological approach. His name is Dr. Ludwig von Mises (pronounced *Mees' is*), presently at New York University. Mises has published a book entitled, *Human Action* (copyright by Yale University Press, 1949, New Haven, Connecticut, USA, $10). It has a sub-title, *A Treatise in Economics.* In order to re-orient economics on the much broader base of praxeology the first 140 pages of this massive and superb text on economics (or praxeology) is devoted to the idea of praxeology as such and to the appropriate epistemology (method for such a science). This epoch-making text is worth intense study by whoever knows how to read well. (Others should limit themselves to Mises' more popular works.)

Six or seven years ago the editor of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM republished a magazine article by Mises, entitled "Middle-of-the-Road Policy Leads To Socialism." He sent it to the preachers in the Christian Reformed church and to many others. As long as he has copies left he will be glad to send them to whoever is interested. That booklet is a common-sense analysis to show that interventionism (which was a pet praxeological idea of Abraham Kuyper; which is the official program of the Anti-Revolutionary Party; and which is the basic content of much of what is taught in the praxeology departments at Calvinist colleges and universities) is

unsound. The argument by Mises is a *rational* argument; he shows that *granted the aim in mind* the interventionist means [which always entail *coercion* in violation of the Sixth Commandement—FN] to accomplish that aim are not suitable to accomplish it but accomplish the contrary. Therefore, the means selected, interventionism, must be wrong — it employs means which are unsuitable to accomplish its own declared purpose.

To someone as this writer, *that* approach (which is purely rationalist) has a further meaning, namely, beyond its convincing rationalism there is the fact that it rejects as unsuitable that kind of action which Scripture declares is contrary to the law of God. On all practical matters we hold that the means which Scripture prescribes are just the means which are the most suitable to attain the human ends which we value highly. For Scripture, *noncoercion* is the proper means to attain the end; for Mises, the *free market* is the proper means to attain the end. Moses makes a *moral* approach; Mises make a praxeological approach. Moses and Mises speak of the same thing; they differ only in the use of different words.

F. N.

What We Would Understand By "Conditioning"

If somebody, or an event, or an idea is associated in your mind with something else, that *association* of ideas will affect your liking or disliking that somebody, event or idea.

The smell of food when you are hungry, makes your "mouth water"; the saliva flows more freely. Pavlov, the famous Russian psychologist, tried the experiment of ringing a bell when food was brought to a dog. Eventually, the dog associated *food* with the *sound* of the bell. When Pavlov finally did not bring food but rang only the bell, the dog's mouth began to drip saliva. The dog had been "conditioned."

Parents similarly "condition" their children. My father conditioned me (besides other things) (1) to oysters and (2) to the idea of the "glory of God." He conditioned me so that I

have never been able to like oysters, and I have always been suspicious of this *glory of God* business.

We shall take the simpler case first, namely, oysters, because it will help to make clear what the "conditioning" was in regard to the idea of the *glory of God.*

The family then consisted of four — parents and a seven-year old son and a five-year old son. The mother liked oysters. The father did not. For once, on a certain day, the main dish was an oyster stew.

The father was equal to the occasion. He called to the attention of his young sons the big "eyes" that the oysters had. How gruesome to eat those big eyes! My five-year old imagination functioned wonderfully. Those oysters were finally nothing but eyes. My mother's effort at counteracting the eye idea was futile. I could not eat oysters then, and it has always been an effort since to do so. I was "conditioned" *against* oysters. I do not remember that there was ever another attempt at having an oyster stew in that household.

In a similar manner my father conditioned me against a certain kind of idea regarding the *glory of God.* That conditioning was far more complex but equally effective. Any mention of the idea of the *glory of God* in certain contexts affects me just as the "eyes" of the oysters in an oyster stew always affect me.

My father was a descendent of Secessionists, that is, of *orthodox* Calvinists who under considerable hardship and some persecution separated from the *nominally* Calvinist state church in the Netherlands, in 1834. The Secessionists were mostly simple folk. They were interested in their personal salvation, and in showing their thankfulness for a hoped-for salvation by grace through obedience to the revealed commands of God. To put it honestly, they were very much interested *in themselves,* in their own salvation. At any rate, so I believe.

Fifty years later (in 1886) there was another exodus out of the state church of the Netherlands. It was known as the Doleantie (the wandering away from the state church). This movement was led by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. But, in this instance, according to

an opinion which my father held, the emphasis was that you should not be so much interested in your own salvation as you were in the *glory of God*. The idea was that what was not purely for the *glory of God* was tainted with sin. My father not only could not bring himself to accept that exclusive emphasis but he was allergic to it and resisted it.

My earliest memory of the distrust of my father in regard to the very prominent mention of the *glory of God* was one Sunday morning. Maybe I was ten or twelve years old. I was walking home with him from the Sunday morning service. The preacher had preached that everything had to be for the *glory of God,* and that salvation had that prime purpose. Salvation was not to save men but to glorify God.

Undoubtedly, in a sense, my father fully agreed to that, but equally, undoubtedly, in a sense he disagreed. And in front of a neighbor's residence, one block from home, on a pleasant Sunday morning, he told his young son that he was very much interested in *his own* salvation, and that he thought there was nothing deficient or sinful about it, and that any preacher who preached that we should be interested in the glory of God *only* if we were to be without sin in the matter was talking beyond reality and common sense.

From that occasion and others like it I was conditioned against any emphatic statement that the motivation of man should be, unalloyed by anything else, purely the *glory of God*.

The discovery of what is meant by the *glory of God* has become an activity which never ceases to continue to greatly interest us. What *is* meant by the glory of God? At times, we have thought that the term, *as used,* had no meaning whatever; just three meaningless words; a cliché (kleeshay), a mere term by which words are a substitute for thought and for meaning.

The Apostle John in his old age developed considerable doubt about the genuineness of the faith of some people, who *talked* about their knowing God. But John wanted some evidence beyond the talk. He said, show me the evidence in the form of obedience (I John 2:3-6).

Similarly we say: what is meant by the *glory of God?* To live for the glory of God consists in what?

A reader may ask: what are you driving at? Our answer is: the *talk* about the *glory of God* appears to us to be somewhat affected by two things, namely, confusion and sanctimony. Further, it is our belief that a sound praxeological analysis will help reduce that confusion and sanctimony. What should we all clearly realize when we think in terms of human action? To live to the *glory of God* is, after all, human action.

F. N.

Scripture Does Not Stand Alone

Scripture *never* stands alone. Scripture is *never* accepted as sufficient revelation. It *cannot* be sufficient revelation.

Scripture is always supplemented by nonscriptural knowledge. If there was no knowledge besides what is in Scripture, Scripture could not be understood. Any claim to the complete sufficiency of Scripture is false.

Nobody has sensibly ever taken Scripture as the all-sufficient source of all knowledge. Men have lived who believed that they did that, but they were suffering from hallucination.

Scripture is necessarily supplemented by *observation* and *reason.*

The *observations* may be naive and inexact observations or they may be "scientific" and "exact" observations. But the observations must be there.

The reasoning may be logical or the reasoning may be fallacious. But the reasoning must be present. Nobody of good judgment accepts isolated statements in Scripture, apart from context and the *whole* teaching of Scripture. Reason is always applied.

In any event the understanding or the misunderstanding of Scripture will be affected by the character of those nonscriptural *observations* and independent *reasonings* of men.

This brings us to the asking of a very important question.

Should modern Calvinism supplement its knowledge from Scripture by naive and primitive observations or by scientific observations?

Let us cite a case — the rising and the setting of the sun. *Naive* observation is that the sun rises and sets, and makes a gigantic journey from east to west every day; and in a mysterious way it returns during the night to its original starting point in the east and repeats its journey during the succeeding day.

It would mean nothing to readers if Scripture spoke of a rising and setting sun, if observation did not reveal a sun and its movement. Any message from Scripture, therefore, which refers to the sun and its movement must refer either to the naive observation just described, or must refer to some other observation, for example, the scientific one, that the sun does not rise or set, but that the earth rotates on its axis.

Scripture, it seems to us, necessarily employed the use of naive observation when only naive observation existed. That was its only means of being intelligible to men of that day. But should the interpretation of Scripture today by us be associated necessarily with naive observations, or should it be associated with scientific observations wherever those observations are reasonably established, and have fully superseded naive observations, as, for example, in regard to the sun?

At once, when a question of that kind is asked the assumption is that the relationship to which we refer is limited to the relationship of Scripture to the physical and biological sciences. There is, in our illustration of the sun, such a relationship to a physical science. But by our question we really have specifically in mind an altogether different relationship, namely, the relationship between Scripture and the social sciences, or as readers will now understand we prefer to put it, *the relationship between Scripture and the sciences of praxeology.*

We are reluctant to bind Scripture today to primitive, naive observations in the field of praxeology (human action); instead *we wish to relate Scripture to the most modern praxeology.* (That is one reason why we selected the word *Progressive* which appears in our name.)

When we relate Scripture to the praxeology we accept we discover that we are not tearing down Scripture but are building it up and making it more meaningful.

Scripture and the brand of praxeology we accept, where they cover the same field, agree and enrich each other. If you will be a regular and careful reader of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM you will, we believe, be delighted to discover what we mean.

F.N.

Individualism Is Compatible With Glorifying God

Human *values* determine all human action. What are legitimate human values?

(1) One set of *values* is that you must act purely for the glory of God.

(2) Another set of *values* is that you must act purely for God and for your fellow men. (The real idea is that when you act for your fellow man you are really acting to the glory of God.)

(3) Another set of *values* is that you must act for the glory of God but that there are many legitimate collateral purposes, secondary to the glory of God. One of those collateral purposes we have just mentioned — sacrificing yourself for your fellow men. There is another which it is dangerous to mention, namely, that you yourself are *individually* a collateral purpose to the glory of God, and that you may — *without sinning in the least thereby* — do something *for yourself*. The development of your own individual personality, the determination of your own individual personal choices, according to this idea, are tolerable and approvable by God, and are consequently not sin.

A typical hyper-Calvinist often has a pretended set of values as in the paragraph (1). A typical neo-Calvinist often has a set of values as in the paragraph (2). If it is possible to hold to the set of values mentioned in paragraph (3) and still be a Calvinist, then the writer is a Calvinist.

A man may consider that a human being has a certain *value* in the sight of God, namely, that he is created in the image of God with rationality and capacity for moral action; that, as such, he is *more than a mere tool or instrument of pleasure for the Creator;* that therefore (so a man may hold) man is a collateral end in himself as well as an actor in the larger framework of society and as a worshipper of the Creator. Why should men believe that God regards man merely as an instrument of pleasure for himself in the same manner as some men regard women merely as instruments of pleasure — an attitude which is widely condemned and not accepted by half of the human beings in the world?

There is a view of practical affairs in this life, in the field of praxeology, which is known as Individualism. That term was long the traditional term used as an antonym (the opposite) of Socialism. Largely because of the writings of Abraham Kuyper, Individualism has among Dutch Calvinists or Calvinists of Dutch origin a bad reputation. Individualism (of all kinds) is therefore rejected in Dutch Calvinist circles. But we in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM are Individualists. We are reluctant to let stand uncriticized a view of Individualism which in effect makes all Individualists moral reprobates and outcasts. Individualism is basically a declaration that at least in some degree a man is an end in himself; (surely, only a subsidiary end in the mind of a religious person, *but still an end*). Most of a man's action may be purely for himself — individualistic — and *not* for his neighbor — *and while purely for himself it can be as much to the glory of God as if it were purely for the neighbor. If some action purely for the neighbor is to the glory of God then something purely for the self is equally to the glory of God, because Scripture does not rate the self lower than the neighbor, because, the law is to love the neighbor as the self and not more than the self.*

All this is interesting in connection with praxeology, which pertains to human action, that is, to *all* human action, that which is personally self-directed action as well as to social action. Praxeology, as a science, then does not, in our thinking, move from the area of virtue to the area of sin when it goes beyond social action to individual action.

This individualism does not make us in the least anti-social, nor, in our opinion, sinners. It can easily be shown how neo-Calvinism puts a false stigma on Individualism by perpetrating an unjustified "extension."

Professor Ludwig von Mises in his *Human Action,* page 143, begins his chapter on "Human Society" with a short paragraph:

> Society is concerted action, cooperation.

But a *genuine* neo-Calvinist will not accept so limited a statement; for him the paragraph should read:

> Society is concerted action, sacrifice.

There you have the extension — the sanctimony of going from *cooperation* to *sacrifice,* from *individualism* to *social action* (sacrifice for the neighbor), from the *Capitalism* of the founders of the United States to the *Interventionism* of Abraham Kuyper, of the Free University, of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and of the content of some of the teaching in Calvinist colleges in this country.

Why is *cooperation* insufficient as the *foundation* of society? Why does a wholly new foundation, *sacrifice,* need to be put under it? We shall eventually aim to show that society cannot be *founded* on sacrifice. It can only be *founded* on cooperation. Neither can it have both foundations.

Individualism, as morally defensible, stands on the idea that it is not sin to look out for yourself; or falls with the idea that it is sin.

F. N.

Christian Reformed "Intellectuals"

What is an "intellectual" or, as the expression now goes, an "egghead"?

Thirty years ago the word often used was intelligentsia. That term has been replaced by *intellectual.* It is quite something to be known as an "*intellectual.*" It puts you above the "masses" or the "mass man."

The best short definition of an *intellectual* is that he is a "dealer in secondhand ideas."

A dealer in secondhand merchandise does not deal in new merchandise. Everything is second, third, fourth, or, say, tenth hand. The same is true of a typical "intellectual." He has no *new* ideas; his ideas are second, third, tenth and twentieth hand.

In the Christian Reformed church, for example, the present-day intellectuals are repeating the original ideas of Kuyper, Bavinck and Geesink. The fact that our intellectuals are informed on what Kuyper, Bavinck and Geesink taught makes our contemporaries "intellectuals." But what they are repeating is now all old stuff. Secondhand, etc.

Occasionally, there is an intellectual who graduates into another class. He is an original thinker. He has a new idea. Everybody knows that there are thousands of intellectuals but only a few original thinkers.

The intellectual is a very important person. He is the human agency by which ideas are popularized. The intellectuals constitute the machinery for spreading ideas. They are not the real *source* of ideas.

Intellectuals include preachers, teachers, writers, doctors, businessmen, farmers — anybody who informs himself on past or current ideas *and disseminates them.* Depending on his judgment, his secondhand stock of ideas has some pretty good and valuable parts in it; or what he has should be picked up by an electric crane and loaded on cars for the blast furnace.

A Christian Reformed *intellectual* in this decade (the 1950s) is a man who knows prevailing secular and religious ideas floating around the world; who selects what he likes best; who gets out a christening font, and then christens any idea which he accepts as neo-Calvinism. The secondhand idea he has picked up may be valuable or it may be junk.

As an agency for spreading ideas he is an *intellectual,* an egghead, and as such he performs a very important function.

We are interested in the ideas of the intellectuals in Calvinist ranks. We hope to swing an electric crane over the pile of secondhand ideas of those intellectuals. F.N.

A New Lucubration

That is the right word, *lucubration*. It means a laborious, overtime study of a clumsy and puffing sort. Somebody working overly hard on an easy problem and taking himself very seriously in regard to that work is, shall we say, lucubrating.

The intellectuals in some Calvinist churches have a new lucubration. That new lucubration consists in anxiety why their denomination is of very little importance in America and agitating that we must do something about it. Basically, few Americans know about the smaller Calvinist denominations or respect them.

Now read the "intellectual" publications within certain denominations and hear the intellectuals grunt with effort, and pant with anxiety, and strain themselves with yearning for recognition in America. They want their denomination to be in the statistics of church life; and to practice the fine arts; and to have c u l t u r e. They wish the denomination to be appreciated and recognized.

People who are really well adjusted do not worry about such things. Great men rest their significance on their deeds and not on popularity. Such new lucubration is therefore additional evidence of an obvious fact, namely, that the strident intellectuals in Calvinist churches have a deep-seated inferiority complex..

And what is wrong? The trouble is with the Calvinists themselves. Epictetus (Ep ic te′ tus), the Roman Stoic philosopher, set forth our problem plainly when he wrote:

> The first difference between one of the vulgar and a philosopher is this: the one says, I am undone on the account of my child, my brother, my father; but the other, if ever he be obliged to say, I am undone! reflects and adds, *on account of myself* . . . If we always . . . , whenever we are unsuccessful, would lay the fault on ourselves, [we would improve ourselves.] But we set out in a very different way from the very beginning. In infancy, for example, if we happen to stumble, our nurse does not chide us, but beats the stone . . .
>
> Epictetus, Book IV, Chapter 19

The thing for the intellectuals of a Calvinist denomination of foreign origin to do is not to complain about its acceptance by Americans, but to be concerned about the content of their message. There must be something wrong about the message of these intellectuals — for America.

The intellectuals in Calvinist churches of Dutch origin have little to offer America that is unique. What have they brought over from the Netherlands?

1. Calvinist orthodoxy. That, however, existed widely in America long before the newer Dutch Calvinist denominations appeared on the scene. There is nothing unique in that.

2. An exceedingly primitive cosmology. That is not an asset but a liability. It quenches the confidence of well-informed men.

3. To offset a primitive cosmology the Calvinist intellectuals have developed a peculiar doctrine known as "common grace," a necessary corollary to naive notions of cosmology and society.

4. A sanctimonious definition of *brotherly love,* basically borrowed from Karl Marx.

5. A modern reversion to the ancient idea of the "divine right of kings" recast in an impressive form, namely, that *all* government has the approval of God (as a manifestation of "common grace") and must be obeyed.

6. An educational idea that schools should be private, that is, should be controlled by parents and not by the state. But *that* idea is really a *liberal* idea which stems less from Dutch Calvinists than from their political opponents. Political liberals and Catholics in the Netherlands have promoted the idea of private education as well as the Calvinists have. However, this is, we believe, the *one* idea that Dutch Calvinists can contribute to America in a genuinely significant fashion.

The intellectuals in the denomination are undone — not by America, nor by their enemies, but by themselves. They might profitably give heed to what has just been quoted from Epictetus.

The program of Calvinist intellectuals is designed to make their denomination important to America. Their apparent modern-

ization program will eventually be found to be ineffective for the following reasons:

1. Their new definition of brotherly love is not based on Scripture, but on the Marxian law of brotherly love. (See February, March, April and May issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.)

2. They implicitly believe in the same idea as their Dutch brethren do that government has "authority" beyond the Decalogue. Breathing hard, they are endeavoring to outrun the Marxians on subjects on which the Marxians are disturbing the whole world including the part which is called the "free world."

3. They have clasped practically every popular *ism* of the age to their bosom as a neo-Calvinist thought. In the process of Dutch-Calvinizing America, they are de-Calvinizing their inherited ideas.

The intellectuals in some Calvinist denominations lament that we are, as Epictetus says, *undone*. By whom? By others? Or are we undone by ourselves — by our own intellectuals? Let us not as the nurses of children who have fallen over a stone, beat the stone. It is time that we give thought to beating ourselves.

F.N.

The Bruins Slot Proposition That The United States Has Become Prosperous Through Luck

There is a Dutch daily newspaper of a Christian sort named Trouw.* *On its front page on September 8, 1955, it ran a column-long editorial to warn its readers against ideas in* PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM. *The editorial was probably by Dr. J. A. H. J. S. Bruins Slot, the editor-in-chief, a Calvinist politician representing the Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Lower House in the Netherlands.*

Bruins Slot makes three main points against PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM:

*See November issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, pages 326-328.

1. The relationship of government to men is not important, but the relationship of government to God is. (We answered that proposition in our November issue, on page 328 and following.)

2. The United States is prosperous by luck — by favorable circumstances. We struck it rich, without really deserving it.

3. The editor of Progressive Calvinism *is superficially and erroneously informed. We shall not devote space to an answer. However, the general contempt manifested by the article is worthy of future separate treatment. We shall at that time not limit ourselves to Bruins Slot, but shall include others and ourselves. Personally, we do not think well of this contempt business, but we are not less-guilty than others and shall certainly not be the first to complain.*

We are in this issue analyzing Bruins Slot's proposition that America is prosperous because of luck.

America's Luck

Bruins Slot wrote as follows (our translation*):

First we would like to call attention to the fact that this magazine [Progressive Calvinism] wishes to estab-

*Because we are open to being charged with an incorrect translation, the original follows:

Allereerst willen wij er de aandacht op vestigen, dat dit blad typisch "Amerikaans" wil zijn. Het omgeeft de "free enterprise"-gedachte met een soort van Amerikaanse mystiek, waarbij "unrestricted prosperity" en "free enterprise" als twee zijden van één medaille worden gezien. Deze gedachte, dat "onbeperkte welvaart" en "volledige ondernemingsvrijheid" onlosmakelijk aan elkaar verbonden zijn komt speciaal in extreem republikeinse kringen in Amerika meer voor, zonder dat men er zich rekenschap van geeft, dat dit verband mogelijk geweest is door de bepaalde omstandigheden van dat land in een bepaalde tijd toen er enorme expansiemogelijkheden bestonden voor iedereen, zonder dat daarbij rechtmatige belangen van anderen behoefden te worden gekrenkt.

Mede door een, ook overigens wel begrijpelijk, Amerikaans zelfbewustzijn komen verscheidene Amerikanen er toe om uit datgene, wat in Amerika in een bepaalde tijd en onder bepaalde omstandigheden practisch niet slecht werkte, een algemeen geldend dogma af te leiden.

lish that it is typically American. It surrounds the "free enterprise" idea with a sort of American mysticism, whereby "unrestricted prosperity" and "free enterprise" are viewed as two sides of the same coin. This idea that unrestricted prosperity and free enterprise are inseparably tied together is prevalent in certain extreme Republican** circles, without there being recognition of the fact that that relationship was possible by a combination of circumstances in a particular country [United States], in a particular era of enormous expansion potentialities for everybody, without there being thereby any necessity to resort to the violation of the legitimate interests of others.

Further, by an understandable American self-consciousness, some Americans come to accept, as if it were a universally valid dogma, a system which in a specific set of circumstances did not work out badly.

The Reprint of The Editorial in "De Wachter"

The Christian Reformed church maintains a Dutch-language newspaper as one of its *official* publications. The name of this weekly is *De Wachter* (The Watchman). One of the Department Editors of *De Wachter* is Reverend William Haverkamp, pastor of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. The foregoing paragraphs plus a few more are quoted by Haverkamp in a recent issue of *De Wachter*.

Haverkamp adds this comment of his own (our translation):

> We see that the aforementioned writer [the editor-in-chief of *Trouw*] is not ready to trade his inheritance [of ideas] with what PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM offers.

Undoubtedly Haverkamp agrees with Bruins Slot that we are somewhat provincial in our "Americanism" and that we are wrong to ascribe American prosperity to the political and economic system we have here; we should have ascribed American prosperity to luck.

**The assumption by Bruins Slot that the editor of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is a Republican is erroneous. He has always been a Jeffersonian Democrat; never a Republican nor a New Deal Democrat.

Haverkamp, as an old friend, refrains from quoting Bruins Slot's more contemptuous remarks about PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM. We thank him. He does not quote any part of Bruins Slot's ideas on the relationship of government to God, which we analyzed in the November issue.

Bruins Slot's Opinion About The Cause Of American Propserity

We admit that we ascribe the prosperity of the United States to "free enterprise," using the term in the customary sense of a free market society.

But Bruins Slot has a different explanation. It is that American prosperity was pure luck. He says it in a roundabout way, but that is nevertheless what he says. He says that free enterprise just happend by chance to be associated in America with prosperity, but that the real explanation of American prosperity consists in:

(1) a favorable combination of circumstances;
(2) a particular era of potential expansion;
(3) in which everybody could be prosperous without necessarily trespassing the (assumed) legitimate interests of others.

In short, America has been prosperous by *luck,* under special circumstances which as an exception permitted freedom from government interventionism. Bruins Slot clearly indicates that if luck had not been with us, then in order to have had prosperity *and also justice,* we could not have retained a free market society, but we would have required an interventionist society, the kind Abraham Kuyper favored, and which came to its full flower in the German *Zwangswirtschaft* (coercive society, *dwang maatschappij*) of Hitler.

Over against this "luck" theory of Bruins Slot (and Haverkamp?) as an explanation of the prosperity of the United States, PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM has an altogether different theory. Our theory is expressed in our Declaration Five which reads:

> (a) Promote confidence that prosperity obtained in a *free* market society is the result of obedience to the law of God; and (b) discontinue all apologies for that prosperity and all policies which will undermine that prosperity.

We have made several references in previous issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM to this Declaration, but have not been able nor shall we be able to develop our ideas fully on that subject until sometime in the future. (See, however, pages 12-13, 149-152, 243-247 in the January, June and September issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.)

We shall at this time make a series of statements summarizing our thought.

1. We are confident that God through the universal validity of His moral law *does* reward the good and punish the evil. There are exceptions, but they are exceptions and not the basic pattern. The exceptions are caused by the unpredictable* events in the natural world, and by violation of the law of God by individual men and by men collectively (especially governments).

2. The basic characteristic of a society organized according to the law of God is the absence of coercion (in other words, obedience to the Sixth Commandment), except that there be that coercion which is used to keep men from open evil — violence, theft, fraud, adultery (the Second Table of the Law).

3. That is the kind of noncoercive society (avoiding coercion as forbidden by the Sixth Commandment) that the Founding Fathers of this country set up. Probably it was the most noncoercive society, and certainly it was one of the most noncoercive societies that has ever existed.

4. The prosperity of the United States is, we believe, *exactly because that kind of society was organized.* We consider that original American society to be based on the law of God far more than the government of the Netherlands was at any time under the premiership of Abraham Kuyper, because Abraham Kuyper promoted an interventionist society (involving coercion) and not a free society. Read his works if you doubt it. The man had confidence in bureaucrats and laws beyond the Decalogue.

Luck? Wherein did our luck consist? Natural resources? Russia in its great land expanse has more natural resources than we have. Are the Russians prosperous? If natural resources explain prosperity, why were not the native American Indians pros-

*Unpredictable from the viewpoint of men.

perous? Did the settlers bring over great wealth? Most of them were from the poorer classes in Europe; many brought nothing along and were poverty stricken. Were these people smarter than others? We certainly doubt it. But why their spectacular prosperity? Our answer is:

1. The government of the United States left them FREE. They could be individualists, that is, they could pursue their own interests. And here, in this land, to pursue your own choices and your own interests was not considered SIN. The result was great resourcefulness, industry and thrift. *That* promoted prosperity.

2. The government of the United States did another thing. It made the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" SAFE. Because title to property was safe, people saved. Savings went into *capital,* the "produced means of production." The accumulation of "capital" became great per capita (per person). *That* is the real reason for America's unusual prosperity. It was "capital" and not natural resources that made us prosperous. And capital would not have been accumulated so rapidly in an interventionist society, which is a non-Biblical society, as it was accumulated in a capitalist (free market) society, which is a Biblical society.

The original United States government merely followed the path Moses laid out in the Second Table of the Law, and its people became prosperous. But that idea is obnoxious to a modern Anti-Revolutionary Party man in the Netherlands, as Bruins Slot, (and Haverkamp?). Bruins Slot's whole political creed is interventionism. But there was originally practically no interventionism in the United States. Interventionism — law on law, bureaucrat on bureaucrat, line on line, precept on precept, tax on tax — that is *his* sure way to prosperity. We did not have that interventionism here; nevertheless, we became prosperous. Therefore, there is for him only one other explanation left for our prosperity — LUCK!

To complete his argument against our views, which is that prosperity in the United States has been the reward of having a government founded in reality on the Law of God, he adds his paragraph that the view we have just expressed is not a "univer-

sally, valid dogma." However, that is exactly the "dogma" which we hold:

1. It is for us a "universally valid dogma" that the law of God gives freedom and security;
2. America's government was *de facto* founded on principles based on the Law of God, and so we have been free and secure;
3. Therefore, we have been prosperous; and also
4. Therefore, it is also for us a "universally valid dogma" that *every* nation which will organize itself according to the great Law of God will eventually be prosperous and secure.

That is for us a "dogma." If it is not true, Scripture can be demonstrated to be unreliable on this subject.

F.N.

Did "Luck" Make Holland Prosperous In Its Golden Age?

Groen van Prinsterer, the great Dutch historian, attributes the prosperity of the Netherlands in its "Golden Age" to sound religion. Groen's proposition essentially is that true religion had the effect of contributing to sound ideas, that sound ideas contributed to good conduct, and that good conduct resulted in the prosperity of the Golden Age of the Netherlands.

Could it be that Groen was wrong about that? Could it be that the Golden Age of the Netherlands was merely a favorable combination of circumstances, or in simple language, pure luck? Assume for the moment that we allege that.

We submit to all Netherlanders and to all Americans of Dutch extraction that the foregoing is as reasonable a proposition as the proposition of Bruins Slot that the United States has been prosperous by pure luck.

There were, indeed, similarities in circumstances for the two countries.

The Dutch had been prostrated by 80 years of war. The Americans, on the other hand, had come into a poverty stricken land of the Indians; there was not a house on this continent. In short, both Dutch and Americans began with handicaps, although they began with different kinds of handicaps.

They both began their prosperity with a new-found liberty. The Dutch had thrown off the oppressive yoke of Philip II; the Americans eventually threw off the restrictions the British wished to apply.

Both Dutch and Americans began under difficulties and developed a minimum of restrictions on liberty. Did they become prosperous by *luck?*

Liberty, we hold, is an essential for prosperity. Liberty, we also hold, is a basic teaching of Scripture; all that Moses ever forbade, in regard to this life, was "the liberty to do wrong"; he merely specified as far as human relations were concerned that violence, adultery, theft, fraud and covetousness are taboo; EVERYTHING ELSE WAS LEFT FREE. Moses did not say you can do only this and this and this, as all interventionist and socialist governments say; no, he said, you may do EVERYTHING except that you may not exploit your neighbor. No man ever used a better method of legislating for liberty than Moses; all he did was to specify a few things you may not do. Paul taught an identical doctrine in the New Testament (Romans 13:10a) when he wrote "Love worketh no ill to the neighbor." Interventionism and socialism specify what you may do; the rest is forbidden. Why? The government has that "peculiar, inherent power" piped from the throne of God to tell you *in detail* what you may or may not do! (See November issue.)

It was not interventionism that made the Dutch prosperous in their Golden Age nor made America great; it was *freedom*, with freedom defined as by Moses and as confirmed in the New Testament, freedom rightly and not sanctimoniously understood.

When emigrants from the Netherlands have come to this country in the 45 years (in which period this writer has had the opportunity to observe them), they undergo a short spasm of wonderment. Then suddenly it is as if somebody injected something

into them. They go to work as beavers. Or to change the figure of speech, they spin the tires of their automobiles on the pavement in what we call a jack-rabbit start, as of some young man off to see his girl friend. What has caused that sudden and astonishing burst of effort? *Liberty.* Those immigrants have suddenly discovered that the "sky is the limit." They have discovered that they can work *as they please.* They have discovered that they can "get ahead." This is a *new* land for those Dutchmen *because of its liberty.*

But at once they begin to "cover up." They begin to hold back information to relatives in the Netherlands who cannot or do not wish to come here. Their prosperity, their own personal unfolding Golden Age, may make those relatives covetous and angry and hostile. Therefore, many immigrants to America do not inform their Dutch relatives. And they cover up another way; they do not tell their Dutch relatives how great freedom has been and still is here. It would discredit the official dogma of interventionism of devout Calvinists in the Netherlands.

But coming back to Dutch prosperity in its Golden Age, we would, it seems to us, be as reasonable when we say that past Dutch prosperity has been because of luck, as Bruins Slot is when he declares that American prosperity is just luck.

Actually, of course, *we* do *not* declare that Dutch prosperity in its Golden Age was because of luck. We declare just the contrary; it was because there was a political, social and economic order *in accordance with the law of God* that Holland had its Golden Age — its great deeds, by its Tromps, De Ruyters, Evertsens and great commerce; its De Witts, Grotiuses and William the Thirds and great freedom; its Rembrandts, Vermeers, Jan Steens, Frans Halses, Ruysdaels and great art; its Vondels, etc., and great poetry. But begin to suppress the kind of freedom which is specifically required by the Second Table of the Law, and inevitably deterioration sets in.

That, we think, is the idea which Scripture teaches. That is just the opposite of what Bruins Slot teaches, if we understand his basic principles. He believes in luck and a regulating government. We do not.

J.V.M. and F.N.

The Commandment Of God Which The "Luck" Idea Is Intended To Frustrate

Is it possible that there is an unconscious motivation for advancing the idea that the United States has been prosperous through *luck?* We believe that there is.

That unconscious motivation is envy and covetousness.

It is really for many churchmen in this age a mistake to say that there are Ten Commandments. For many of them there are only nine. The Tenth Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet . . . anything that is thy neighbor's," is a dead letter. We recommend, therefore, to those who would be modern-minded that they hereafter speak more accurately by saying, The *Nine* Commandments.

Not only is personal covetousness rampant, group and collective covetousness are considered meritorious and "Christian."

Pressure groups are seldom groups protecting their legitimate interests (as the Bible defines legitimate interests) but are groups coveting for themselves something that they hope to extort from another group or from society at large. The very term, *pressure* groups, indicates coercion is an essential part of their program. What is wanted but that cannot be obtained by voluntary exchange — genuinely voluntary on both sides — involves coveting.

If *A* obtains prosperity because he has basically operated according to the law of God (no violence, theft or fraud), then he has no material obligation to *B* except charity. But if *A* has prosperity *by luck,* and if that luck is under the providence of God, then *B* may appear to have a good moral claim on *A* for material goods.

The greater the rôle of luck in getting prosperity, the weaker the claim of anyone retaining his prosperity for himself. If prosperity is the result of luck *only,* then there is not anything to be said morally or logically in defense of private property.

Many of the people of the world consider American wealth to be the result of luck. We Americans are therefore, they conclude, not entitled to it *for ourselves.*

That, we believe, is also the subconscious motivation behind Bruins Slot's idea about American prosperity. We obtained prosperity basically by luck; and so the rest of the world has a good claim on it.

Away with the Tenth Commandment!

F.N.

Information About 1956 Subscriptions

Subscriptions to PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM are on a calendar-year basis. We shall be much pleased if you will renew your subscription for the coming year, 1956.

We are also interested in *new* subscribers for 1956. It will not be practical to become a subscriber in 1956 without having read the 1955 issues. To be a *new* subscriber for 1956 requires purchase of the 1955 issues which we are having bound in paper covers. *New* subscribers for 1956 can subscribe for a total of $4 (paperbound for 1955, $2; future issues in 1956, $2). Paperbound copies to *nonsubscribers* are available at $3.

In appreciation of present subscribers, we shall send them a paperbound book FREE if they will return their copies to us.

A Better Translation

In the November issue (page 329) we translated the Dutch words *willekeurig individu* as "temperamental individual." It has been called to the writer's attention that in this instance a better translation would probably be "random individual."

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